

PRESS RELEASE

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WOMAN CONVICTED OF CONSPIRACY TO TAKE ILLEGAL ALIENS HOSTAGE

PHOENIX - The U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Arizona announced that on May 27, 2004, Besy Arely Maldonado-Perez, DOB 6/23/75, a citizen of Honduras most recently residing in Phoenix, was found guilty of Conspiracy to Commit Hostage Taking, Harboring Illegal Aliens and Conspiracy to Harbor Illegal Aliens, by a federal jury in Phoenix.

The evidence at trial showed that on March 24, 2003, officers from the Phoenix Police Department and agents from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement found 22 illegal aliens being held in a dirty, foul-smelling and crowded one-bedroom apartment at 4620 W. McDowell Road in Phoenix. During a search warrant agents found a disassembled rifle, spent shell casings and other unspent ammunition.

Five men residing at the apartment were guarding the aliens and all previously pled guilty to conspiracy to take hostages and/or conspiracy to harbor aliens. The evidence showed that, upon arrival at the apartment, the guards took any money the aliens had in their possession to credit against their smuggling debt. Guns were fired within the apartment. The aliens stayed mostly in the back bedroom of the apartment which contained no furniture and had a sliding glass

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door locked from the outside. The aliens were forced to stay at the apartment until family members sent the smuggling fee through Western Union and provided the access code for retrieval of the fee.

The evidence at trial showed that Maldonado came to the apartment to speak with the aliens in person and with family members by phone about the smuggling fees and to pick up the access codes to retrieve money from Western Union. Maldonado was in charge of the guards. After their arrest , the guards together called Maldonado from jail and she promised to send money to their jail accounts.

Maldonado had been charged with two counts of violating Title 18 of the United States Code, Section 1203, Hostage Taking (conspiracy and aid and abet); and two counts of violating Title 8 of the United States Code, Section 1324, Harboring Illegal Aliens (conspiracy and aid and abet). The jury acquitted Maldonado of the charge of aiding and abetting the taking of hostages.

The case was tried before United States District Court Judge Stephen M. McNamee from May 25, 2004 to May 27, 2004.

A conviction for Conspiracy to Commit Hostage Taking carries a maximum penalty of life in prison, a \$250,000 fine, or both. The conviction for Conspiracy to Harbor Illegal Aliens carries a maximum penalty of ten years in prison, a \$250,000 fine, or both. The conviction for Aiding and Abetting the Harboring of Illegal Aliens carries a maximum penalty of five years in prison, a \$250,000 fine, or both.

The investigation leading to the guilty verdict was conducted by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The defendant is being held in custody following trial. Sentencing is set before Judge McNamee on August 23, 2004. The prosecution is being handled by Camille Bibles and Gary Restaino, Assistant U.S. Attorneys, District of Arizona, Phoenix.

CASE NUMBER: CR-03-01064-PHX
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